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ABSTRACT

In his State of the Union Address delivered January 2002, President Bush outlined the next critical step in education reform: to prepare children to read and succeed in school with improved Head Start and early childhood development programs. This report describes early childhood as a critical time for children to develop the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills they will need for the rest of their lives and presents the components of the Good Start, Grow Smart early childhood initiative of the Bush Administration. The three major areas addressed in the initiative are described: (1) strengthening Head Start through a new accountability system and a national training program; (2) partnering with states to improve early childhood education through the development of quality criteria for early childhood education to align the programs with K-12 state standards; and (3) providing information to teachers, caregivers, and parents through public awareness campaigns and through support of research to identify effective prereading and language curricula and teaching strategies. (KB)

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GOOD START, GROW SMART

*The Bush Administration's
Early Childhood Initiative*

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Executive Summary

In his State of the Union Address delivered January 2002, President Bush outlined the next critical step in education reform – the need to prepare children to read and succeed in school with improved Head Start and early childhood development programs. The President’s call is built upon themes developed at the First Lady’s Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development, held in July of 2001.

Early childhood, which is the period in a child’s life from birth through age 5, is a critical time for children to develop the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills they will need for the rest of their lives. These young children receive care in a wide variety of settings. While 38 percent receive care solely from their parents, the remaining 62 percent receive care through a variety of arrangements, including care by non-parental relatives, non-relatives, and center-based programs, including Head Start.

Because a significant number of young children receive care outside the home, Federal and State governments provide more than \$18 billion annually to help families – particularly low-income families – to purchase non-parental care. This investment includes more than \$14 billion in Federal support alone. Despite these significant resources, not all children are receiving high-quality care for several reasons:

- 1) Most States have limited alignment between what children are doing before they enter school and what is expected of them once they are in school;
- 2) Early childhood programs are seldom evaluated based on how they prepare children to succeed in school; and
- 3) There is not enough information for early childhood teachers, parents, grandparents, and child care providers on ways to prepare children to be successful in school.

President Bush believes that all children must begin school with an equal chance at achievement so that no child is left behind. The Bush Administration has proposed a new early childhood initiative – *Good Start, Grow Smart* – to help States and local communities strengthen early learning for young children. This will ensure that young children are equipped with the skills they will need to start school ready to learn.

The Bush Administration’s *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative addresses three major areas:

- **Strengthening Head Start:** Through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Administration will develop a new accountability system for Head Start to ensure that every Head Start center assesses standards of learning in early literacy, language, and numeracy skills. HHS will also implement a national training program with the goal of training the nearly 50,000 Head Start teachers in early literacy teaching techniques.
- **Partnering with States to Improve Early Childhood Education:** The Administration proposes a stronger Federal-State partnership in the delivery of quality early childhood programs. This new approach will ask States to develop quality criteria for early childhood education, including voluntary guidelines on pre-reading and language skills activities that

align with State K-12 standards. To help States meet these criteria, States will have more flexibility with their Federal child care funds.

- **Providing Information to Teachers, Caregivers and Parents:** In order to close the gap between the best research and current practices in early childhood education, the Department of Education will establish a range of partnerships as part of a broad public awareness campaign targeted toward parents, early childhood educators, child care providers, and other interested parties. To assist this effort, the Bush Administration supports an unprecedented \$45 million research collaborative between the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Department of Education to identify effective pre-reading and language curricula and teaching strategies.

Good Start, Grow Smart: President Bush's Plan to Strengthen Early Learning

President Bush has made the education of every child in America among his top domestic priorities. To that end, he signed the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which proposed reforms expressing his confidence in our public schools and their mission to build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* is important because it ensures that public schools are teaching students what they need to know to be successful in life. It also draws attention to the need to prepare children before they start school. What children learn before coming to school is vital to their success. The first five years of a child's life are a time of tremendous physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth. Children enter the world with many needs in order to grow: love, nutrition, health, social and emotional security, and stimulation in the important skills that prepare them for school success. Children also enter the world with a great capacity to learn. It should be our goal as a Nation to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to learn the fundamental skills needed to be successful in school.

The Importance of Early Childhood Cognitive Development

Early childhood generally refers to the period from birth through age 5. A child's cognitive development during early childhood, which includes building skills such as pre-reading, language, vocabulary, and numeracy, begins from the moment a child is born. Developmental scientists have found that the brain acquires a tremendous amount of information about language in the first year of life even before infants can speak. By the time babies utter or understand their first words, they know which particular sounds their language uses, what sounds can be combined to create words, and the tempo and rhythm of words and phrases.

There is a strong connection between the development a child undergoes early in life and the level of success that the child will experience later in life. For example, infants who are better at distinguishing the building blocks of speech at 6 months are better at other more complex language skills at 2 and 3 years of age and better at acquiring the skills for learning to read at 4 and 5 years of age. Not surprisingly, a child's knowledge of the alphabet in kindergarten is one of the most significant predictors of what that child's tenth grade reading ability will be.

When young children are provided an environment rich in language and literacy interactions and full of opportunities to listen to and use language constantly, they can begin to acquire the essential building blocks for learning how to read. A child who enters school without these skills runs a significant risk of starting behind and staying behind.

Early Childhood Care and Education

Young children are cared for in a wide variety of settings. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, 38 percent of children age 5 or younger receive care on a regular basis from parents only. The remaining 62 percent of children are in one or more arrangements,

including care by other relatives (24 percent), non-relatives (17 percent), or center-based programs (34 percent), including Head Start (6 percent). Children between the ages of 3 and 5 are more likely than children younger than 3 to be cared for in a center-based program, such as child care and Head Start. Children under the age of 3 are more likely to be in the care of a parent than are children older than 3.

Parents are a child's first and most important teachers. It is significant that nearly 40 percent of young children are cared for primarily by a parent. The Bush Administration believes it is important to support parents and families in their most important task in life – raising their children – through several means, including providing them information about early childhood development.

Funding for Early Childhood Care and Education

Because a significant number of young children are cared for outside the home and by people other than their parents, Federal and State governments provide resources for families, particularly low-income families, to purchase non-parental care. Combined Federal and State funding provides more than \$18 billion to support care for young children, ranging from home-based care to care in center-based programs such as public pre-kindergarten (pre-k) programs and Head Start. The Federal government alone spends more than \$14 billion on these services in addition to programs that provide for the health and well-being of children and families. Major programs include:

Programs administered through the Department of Health and Human Services

Head Start

Head Start provides grants to local public and private agencies to provide comprehensive child development services to children and families. Intended primarily for preschoolers from low-income families, Head Start promotes school readiness for approximately 915,000 children. Head Start children also receive comprehensive health services, including immunizations, physical and dental exams and treatment, and nutritional services. The average Head Start program provides part-day services for eight or nine months out of the year at an average cost of \$6,800 per child. An estimated 225,000 children, however, are being served in full-day, full-year programs to help meet the child care needs of parents who are either working or in job training. In FY 2002, Head Start is funded at \$6.5 billion.

Early Head Start

Early Head Start's mission is to promote healthy prenatal care for pregnant women, enhance the development of very young children, and promote healthy families. Since its inception in 1994, it has grown to a nationwide effort of 635 community-based programs serving 62,000 children. In FY2002, Early Head Start is funded at \$621 million out of the Head Start budget.

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)

CCDF provides funding to States for child care, the majority of which is spent on care for children age of 5 or younger. At least 4 percent of these funds must be spent on improving the quality of care. About 75 percent of CCDF funds are distributed through certificates or vouchers

which parents can use to obtain child care services in a variety of settings. In 2000, for example, 56 percent of children being served under CCDF were cared for in a child care center, 31 percent were in family child care homes, 4 percent were in group homes, and 9 percent were cared for in the child's own home. In FY 2002, CCDF is funded at \$4.8 billion.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

In 2000, States spent nearly \$4 billion of TANF funds on child care. Under the President's welfare reform proposal, States would continue to have flexibility to transfer up to 30 percent of TANF funds to CCDF and to spend additional TANF dollars directly for child care.

Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)

SSBG funds a broad range of social services and is another significant Federal funding source for child care. In 2000, 43 States reported spending \$165 million in SSBG funds for child care, accounting for 9 percent of the total \$1.77 billion in SSBG expenditures that year.

Programs administered through the Department of Education

Title I-supported Preschool Programs

Many school districts support preschool programs with their Title I (Education for the Disadvantaged) funds. In FY 2002, the Department of Education estimates that about 2-3 percent of Title I funds, or approximately \$200 million, is used for this purpose. Title I pre-school programs help more than 300,000 children in high-poverty communities enter kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed in school.

Early Reading First

This program, established in the *No Child Left Behind Act*, provides competitive grants to school districts and pre-school programs, such as Head Start centers. The grants fund the development of model programs to support the school readiness of preschool-aged children, particularly those from low-income families. Program activities will prepare teachers to provide high-quality language, literacy, and pre-reading activities, using scientifically based research to support children's understanding of letters, letter sounds and the blending of sounds and words. Through the use of an increasingly complex and rich spoken vocabulary, developed in part through teacher-read stories, children will begin to build a strong foundation for learning to read. In FY 2002, Early Reading First is funded at \$75 million.

Even Start

This program supports projects that provide educational services to low-income families, including parents eligible for services under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act and their children from birth through age 7. The program improves the educational opportunities of children and their parents in low-income areas by integrating early childhood education, adult education, parenting education, and interactive literacy activities between parents and their children into "family literacy" programs. Even Start serves approximately 27,000 children under 5 years old. In FY 2002, Even Start is funded at \$250 million.

Special Education Preschool Grants and State Grants

The Special Education Preschool program, along with 6 percent of Special Education State grants, provides formula grants to States to make available special education and related services for 3- to 5-year-old children with disabilities. It supports early childhood programs that provide services needed to prepare young children with disabilities to enter and succeed in school. The Preschool Grants program provides a developmental bridge between early intervention services and elementary school. In FY 2002, Special Education Preschool Grants and State Grants provide approximately \$500 million for early childhood services.

Special Education Grants for Infants and Families

This formula grant program assists States in implementing a coordinated statewide system of early intervention services to all children with disabilities, from birth through 2 years old, and their families. In FY 2002, Special Education Grants for Infants and Toddlers are funded at \$51 million.

The Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program

This competitive grant program enables early childhood educators and caregivers working in high-poverty communities to participate in professional development activities that improve their knowledge and skills. The professional development activities focus on furthering children's language and literacy skills to help set them on the road to reading proficiency once they enter kindergarten. In FY 2002, the Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program is funded at \$15 million.

Research Programs

The National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education

This Institute supports work to identify, develop, evaluate, and assist others in replicating methods and approaches that improve children's early development and education. It supports research regarding the social and educational development of infants, toddlers, and preschool children, and the preparation of personnel for early childhood programs.

Early Childhood Longitudinal Study

This interagency study, spearheaded by the Department of Education, has two components: it chronicles the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development of a large sample of children from birth to age 6 and will follow another sample of children from kindergarten through fifth grade. These studies will provide researchers, policy makers, and parents with information on child development policies and practices.

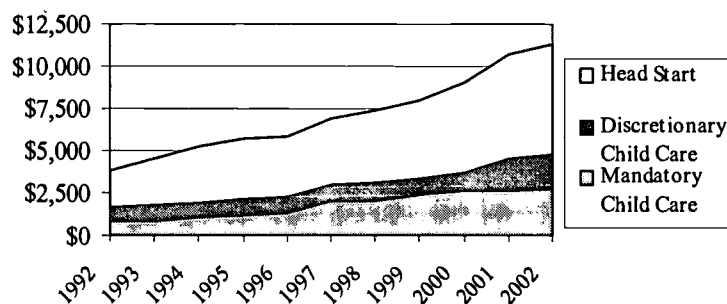
Meeting Early Childhood Needs

Between Federal and State funding for early childhood care, most families are able to provide care for their young children before they start school. Over the past decade, Federal funds specifically appropriated for child care have tripled. Funding from the CCDF, TANF, and SSBG alone will provide child care assistance to an estimated 2.7 million children per month, the majority of whom are under the age of 6. This funding is expected to provide care for 72 percent

of children between the ages of 3 and 5 whose parents are low income and work at least 20 hours a week. In addition, Head Start provides care to 915,000 children.

State support of and funding for child care and early childhood programs has also increased. Two decades ago, for example, only 10 States were providing pre-k programs. Today, 39 States and the District of Columbia provide support for pre-k programs. States are currently contributing about \$4 billion of State funds to pre-kindergarten and child care programs. In 2001, States spent in excess of \$1.9 billion for more than 765,000 children to attend pre-k. Additionally, in 2002, States provided an estimated \$2 billion in State funds to subsidize child care.

**Federal Spending on Child Care and Head Start
(\$millions)**



Access to care, however, does not necessarily mean that children are receiving high-quality care, especially as it relates to early learning and cognitive development.

Some of the obstacles that should be addressed in order to ensure that early childhood care focuses on learning and cognitive development as well as social and emotional development include:

- Most States have limited alignment between what children are doing before they enter school and what is expected of them once they are in school;
- Early childhood programs are seldom evaluated based on how they prepare children to succeed in school; and
- There is not enough information for early childhood teachers, parents, grandparents, and child care providers on ways to prepare children to be successful in school.

The Bush Administration has developed a plan for overcoming these obstacles and for strengthening early learning for young children to equip them with the skills they will need to start school ready to learn. The Administration will strive to meet this goal by addressing needs in three key areas: Strengthening Head Start; Partnering with States to Improve Early Childhood Education; and Providing Information to Teachers, Caregivers and Parents. All children must begin school with an equal chance at achievement so that no child is left behind.

Strengthening Head Start

Overview

Head Start provides grants to local public and private agencies to provide comprehensive child development services to children and families. In FY 2002, Head Start's budget is \$6.5 billion, and President Bush has proposed to fund it at \$6.7 billion in FY 2003. The program serves 915,000 children – approximately 65 percent of all eligible 3- and 4-year-olds – through a network of 1,545 local grantees.

Intended primarily for preschoolers from low-income families, Head Start's mission is to promote school readiness to enable each child to develop to his or her fullest potential. Head Start children also receive comprehensive health services, including immunizations, physical and dental exams and treatment, and nutritional services. Head Start engages parents in their children's learning and helps them make progress toward their educational and employment goals. Head Start programs are evaluated through on-site monitoring at least once every three years.

In 1994, the Early Head Start program was established because of the mounting evidence that the earliest years, from birth to 3 years of age, also are crucial to children's growth and development. In FY 2002, an estimated 62,000 toddlers will be served under the Early Head Start program.

During the 1999 reauthorization of Head Start, Congress mandated that Head Start programs implement standards of learning in early literacy, language, and numeracy skills. These standards of learning set the following goals for children enrolled in Head Start:

- Develop phonemic, print, and numeracy awareness.
- Understand and use language to communicate for various purposes.
- Understand and use increasingly complex and varied vocabulary.
- Develop and demonstrate an appreciation of books.
- In the case of non-English background children, progress toward acquisition of the English language.
- Know that the letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named.
- Recognize a word as a unit of print.
- Identify at least 10 letters of the alphabet.
- Associate sounds with written words.

These standards of learning, however, have yet to be fully and effectively implemented. The Bush Administration will strengthen Head Start by ensuring that Head Start programs are evaluated on whether they effectively prepare children to meet standards of learning and by training Head Start teachers to use the best methods of early reading and language skills instruction in order to better teach to these standards.

Summary of Initiatives

Ensure Cognitive Development for Children in Head Start. President Bush has directed HHS to develop a strategy to ensure that, for the first time, every Head Start center assesses the standards of learning in early literacy, language, and numeracy skills. This new accountability system will be field tested in the 2002-2003 academic year, with full implementation planned for Fall 2003.

Every local Head Start program will be required to assess all participants between the ages of 3 and 5 on these indicators at the beginning, middle, and end of each year and to analyze the assessment data on the progress and accomplishments of all enrolled children. Federal program monitoring teams will conduct on-site reviews of a program's implementation of these requirements.

HHS is also designing a national reporting system to collect data from every local program. This system, together with ongoing Head Start research and from Head Start on-site program monitoring reviews, will create comprehensive information on local program effectiveness. Local program data will be used to target new efforts in staff training and program improvement to enhance the capacity of Head Start to increase children's early literacy and school readiness. In addition, data on whether a program is successfully teaching standards of learning will be used in HHS evaluations of local Head Start agency contracts.

Provide Training for Head Start Teachers. Project STEP, Head Start's Summer Teacher Education Program, will provide all Head Start programs the opportunity and funding to participate in a series of intensive early literacy training activities. This year-long training effort will be based on a nationally recognized and research-based teacher training model.

This summer, 2,500 Head Start teachers and child care providers representing programs across the country will attend one of a series of four-day regional training sessions to become Early Literacy Specialists. They will receive 32 hours of training in curriculum topics including fostering phonemic awareness, classroom arrangement to support a literacy rich environment, and basic resources and materials necessary in each classroom to promote literacy. Early Literacy Specialists will then return to their respective Head Start programs and begin training other classroom teachers to provide enhanced early literacy teaching, materials, and learning opportunities for children when centers reopen this fall. The program goal is to train every Head Start teacher in the country by the end of next year.

This unprecedented training initiative will also provide follow-up mentoring and coaching of individual teachers to assist them in implementing teaching strategies and responding to diverse groups of children. A comprehensive, independent evaluation will be designed and implemented to assess the impact of this training effort on teacher knowledge, classroom practice, and effectiveness for children.

Partnering with States to Improve Early Learning

Overview

Efforts to improve early childhood learning will not work unless they involve States and school districts, which shoulder the primary responsibility for providing public education. Since States and districts are directly responsible for student learning and achievement in school, preparing children to learn before they start school is in their best interest. This is particularly true now that the *No Child Left Behind* law requires standards and accountability for every school in America. Many States and districts have already taken concrete steps in recognition that, in order for students to succeed once they reach school, they must come prepared to learn.

The Administration's plan calls on all States to take steps that will help prepare children before they enter school to be ready to learn. For example, States should help coordinate the public schools with the early childhood programs that serve the children they later educate. This can be accomplished in part by making available to early childhood programs information on what will be expected of children once they reach school and what skills children will need to learn before school in order to meet State standards in school.

The Administration's plan also envisions a Federal partnership with States to strengthen early learning by providing greater flexibility with Federal funds and by offering resources in the form of teacher training and program guidance. The Federal government already partners with States in many ways, including through early childhood funding. In order to access Federal CCDF and TANF funds to provide early childhood programs, States must submit a biennial plan on how they will use their funds. At least 4 percent of these funds must be spent on improving the quality of child care. States must also provide maintenance of effort (MOE) expenditures and matching funds based on their current Medicaid matching rate, which ranges from 50 to 76 percent. They may use part of their State spending on pre-k programs to meet up to 20 percent of these matching requirements. In 2000, States exceeded the amount required to draw down Federal funds, spending at least \$2.2 billion of State funds on early childhood programs.

Summary of Initiatives

Encourage States to Set Quality Criteria for Early Childhood Education. In exchange for Federal CCDF funds, which include a set-aside to improve the quality of care, States would be required to identify in their biennial State plan a set of quality-related criteria. Goals would include:

- **Early Learning Guidelines.** Voluntary State guidelines on literacy, language, and pre-reading skills activities for children ages 3 to 5 that align with State K-12 standards. These guidelines should be able to be adapted to various child care settings;
- **Professional development.** A State plan for offering education and training activities to child care and pre-school teachers and administrators, which can also include Federally funded training initiatives;

- **Program Coordination.** A State plan for coordinating at least four early childhood programs, which may include CCDF, Head Start, programs in the public schools, and TANF, among others.

Expand State Flexibility in Child Care Match. To give States more flexibility in funding their quality criteria, they would be allowed to increase to 30 percent the amount of State pre-k funds they can use to match Federal child care funds. Currently States may use their spending on pre-k programs to meet up to 20 percent of the CCDF matching requirements.

Establish New State Program Integration Waivers. As part of the President's Welfare Reform proposal, States will be able to seek new waivers for integrating funding and program rules across a broad range of public assistance programs, including those that benefit young children. These waivers will enable States and school districts to better coordinate early childhood programs. For example, States could integrate TANF, Child Care, Food Stamps, Workforce Investment Act, and Employment Assistance programs into a comprehensive workforce assistance system that includes early childhood care.

Establish Early Childhood Educator Academies. The Department of Education will host regional Early Childhood Educator Academies to deliver scientifically-based research on cognitive development and highlight practical ideas to pre-k teachers and child care providers. The Academies will use model training methods and rely on nationally recognized early childhood experts.

Provide Guidance to States on Coordination of Services. The Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force (U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services) will provide guidance to States on how to coordinate early childhood services and programs in order to avoid duplication of services and improve children's learning as they transition from pre-k to elementary school.

Providing Parents, Teachers, and Caregivers Information on Early Learning

Overview

Children need parents, teachers, and others to prepare them for success in school and in life. Scientific research clearly demonstrates that parents and preschool programs can use specific activities to prepare children for school. But there is a gap between what we know and what we do in early childhood education. In order to close this gap, the Department of Education will establish partnerships with private, public, and civic groups to highlight the importance of early childhood development. These partnerships will provide to a wide audience of parents, pre-school providers, teachers, policy-makers, and the public, information and curriculum to help guide children effectively toward successful vocabulary development, pre-reading, and numeracy skills.

Summary of Initiatives

Highlight Early Childhood Education Research. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development will work with offices in the Department of Education and the Administration for Children and Families within HHS to identify the most effective early pre-reading and language curricula and teaching strategies for early childhood educators and caregivers. This \$45 million, five-year research initiative represents the first time in the history of these Departments that the full range of talent and resources within the Federal Government has been marshaled to address a topic of major significance involving our Nation's children.

The objective of this initiative is to determine through rigorous experimental methods how best to provide children from birth through age 5 with the interactions essential for developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that lead to a smooth transition to early school achievement. The initiative will answer the following questions:

- Which approaches are most effective for which children, at which stages of development, and under which conditions and settings?
- What knowledge and skills do adults need to effectively implement these approaches?
- What are effective approaches for providing adults with the knowledge and skills essential for implementing the curricula with positive results?

Researchers will establish partnerships with early childhood program sites supported at Federal, State, and community levels. Sites may include Head Start, Early Head Start, pre-kindergarten programs, center-based child care, and family day care. Researchers will identify curricula that effectively promote language and cognitive development, early literacy, and mathematics concepts and skills, while simultaneously developing children's self-regulatory and social-emotional competencies, motivation, and positive attitudes toward learning. The findings will help guide the structure of early childhood programs and training for early childhood education teachers and other adults responsible for children's learning and development.

Provide a Guidebook for Parents and Families. A series of booklets titled "Healthy Start, Grow Smart" will provide helpful information on ways to assure the health, safety, nutrition, and

cognitive development of newborns and will be made available to new parents as well as online. Modeled after a similar program that First Lady Laura Bush initiated in Texas, the series will be launched at the national level to provide parents and families with more information on a child's development during the crucial first stages of life.

Provide a Guidebook for Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers. The Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force will make available to educators and caregivers a guidebook on steps they can take with children to ensure strong cognitive development while supporting strong social and emotional development. *Teaching Our Youngest* acknowledges the important role preschool teachers and child care and family providers play in the lives of young children.

Teaching Our Youngest will provide concrete examples to caregivers for use in their daily interactions with children. Also included are strategies for creating a preschool environment that addresses all of the children's developmental domains. Early childhood educators may use this guidebook to assist them in designing programs that incorporate cognitive development and early literacy activities into a comprehensive program. Through specific demonstrations, teachers will learn simple strategies to nurture the natural curiosity of children and their zest for learning.

Award "Sunshine" Schools and Initiatives. The Department of Education will highlight exemplary preschool programs and initiatives throughout the country and make available best practices from States, counties, school districts, pre-k programs, Head Start sites and child care centers.



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